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# NON-CONSTITUTIVE RHETORIC: OR THE BANALITY OF CONTROL

BIOPOLITICS, LEXICON AFFECT, DELEUZE/GUATTARI, NON CONSTITUTIVE RETHORIK

My purpose today is to update the rhetorical studies theory of subjectivity. I argue that 'affect theory' should replace the older psychoanalytic model of interpellation. To concretize my argument, I analyze banal rhetoric; namely, the cybernetic subjectivity produced by "stock listings, currencies, corporate accounting, national budgets, computer languages, mathematics, scientific functions, [and] equations" (Lazzarato, Signs and Machines, 80).

Before I dive in, let provide you with a short preview of my argument. I begin by considering an essential axiom of critical rhetoric theory: "rhetoric produces subjectivity." The prevailing theory is that subjectivity is an ideological effect of an implied audience (Charland, "Québécois"; Delgado, "Chicano Movement"). The most popular explanatory mechanism is interpellation, which draws on Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of symbolic mediation (Althusser, "ISA," 162). I argue that this model is no longer appropriate, for as Eugene Holland argues, "what Althusser actually describes is not the ideological constitution of the Subject, but only of the citizen" ("Schizoanalytic Critique"). The consequence of my argument is that rhetoricians explaining subjectivity through interpellation limited their focus to the State and relations of obedience/disobedience.

Second, I explain how banal rhetoric reveals modes of subjectivity beyond the citizen-subject. My claim is that rhetorical power now "speaks, communicates, and acts 'assisted' by all kinds of mechanical, thermodynamic, cybernetic, and computer machines" (Lazzarato, Signs and Machines, 29). I analyze "the language of infrastructures" to show how rhetoric solicits subjectivity without constituting a people or even addressing a subject (Pasolini, Heretical Empiricism, 63; Lazzarato, Signs and Machines, 61). As such, I do not celebrate affects as a challenge to abusive power; rather, I follow in the footsteps of Frédéric Lordon, who argues in Willing Slaves of Capital that joyous affects are the very means of our contemporary exploitation.

Lastly, I suggest two consequences from studying banal rhetoric: one, artifact selection need not be tied to rhetoric that hails "the people," invokes an identity, or provides a symbolic program of action (McGee, "The People"; Charland, "Peuple Québécois"; Delgado, "Chicano Movement"); and two, the political search for rhetorical resistance need not emerge from distinct counterpublics or out-law discourses (Warner, Publics and Counter-Publics; Sloop and Ono, "Out-Law Discourse").

Briefly restating my roadmap: I begin by discussing interpellation, continue with a discussion of affect, and end with the

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consequence an affect theory of subjectivity for future scholarship.

## Part I: Subjectivity

As with the critical turn in the humanities and interpretive sciences, rhetorical studies has theorized the production of subjectivity for many decades. Perhaps the most canonical reference is Maurice Charland's importation of French Marxist Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation in his 1987 essay on the *Peuple Québécois*. Interpellation fulfills the overall materialist goal of critical rhetoric by breaking ideology out of the realm of mere ideas "to rematerialize ideology" as an agent of social reproduction (Macherey, "Figures of Interpellation," 9). While most of us know how Althusser characterized ideology as an agent in the scene of interpellation, it is helpful to review *both* of the rituals of recognition in his original text: the most repeated scene involves a policeman who spots someone on the street and shouts "Hey, you there!," to which the subject turns around believing that it is them being hailed (174-175); a warner scene unfolds a few pages earlier in which a friend knocking at the door prompts us to ask "Who's there," and they respond "It's me," to which we open the door for them (172-173). Together, the two scenes outline the rhythm of interpellation as the ritual of a call-and-response in which ideology is materialized as address.

The concept of ideology grows from Marx's desire to show how the economic basis for capitalism is hidden from the consciousness of its agents of production. Yet the agents in the scenes of interpellation are not workers who fail to realize that 'profit is unpaid work.' So then what is going on 'behind their backs'? For Althusser, that the process of recognition is really a process of mis-recognition. To subjects themselves, their subjectivity appears tautologically transparent, "I am what I am," whereas Althusser shows how subjectivity is produced by a voice of authority that calls a subject into being (Althuser, For Marx, 233; Butler, Psychic Life of Power, 110). Charland astutely observes that the voice of authority is rhetorical and is found in constitutional documents that declare the existence of a people, though he generalizes the term to "the very act of addressing" (140). Fitting this into concepts familiar to rhetorical theory, we can thus say subjectivity is an ideological effect of any implied audience (Black, "Second Persona").

There are limitations to Althusser's model because of his theory of power, which is tied to the State and subsequent relations of obedience/disobedience. Interpellation is part of Althusser's longer argument about the ideological power of states (ISAs), so it is no surprise that he depicts a policeman hailing a subject as a representative of the law. We might ask the questions: is the production of subjectivity limited to interactions with the state? What about other types of power, namely capitalism? Althusser never provides a model the generation of subjectivity in other circumstance, so I am persuaded by Eugene Holland, who notes that the repertoire for an Althusserian subject is limited to that of a citizen's consent or refusal ("Schizoanalytic Critique"). The limitations of interpellation fare no better if we draw deeper on Althusser's source material: Lacan's work on the Oedipal "name of the father," which is the linguistic-performative force of the symbolic that drives us to desire through prohibition (Écrits [2006], "The Signification of the Phallus," 577-83). According to the Lacanian model, the desiring subject does more than just comply with the voice of authority, they publicly perform how they relate to "perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects" for their own enjoyment (Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism," For Marx, 233). Yet even when responding to "a system of representations" and the "structures that they impose of the vast majority of [us]," the ideological subject still conforms to a binary for/against, perhaps with the qualified position of in-between, as seen in Stuart Hall's resistant reading, Pêcheux's dis-identification, and Fiske's active audiences (233; "Encoding/Decoding"; Language, Semantics, and Ideology; Television Culture).

While beyond the scope of this paper, an interesting middle-ground could be struck with the Lacanian generation of subjectivity by way of suture. Suture is most popular in film studies and makes its argument through the Marxian turn to form over content. The term originated from Jacques-Alain Miller, inheritor to the Lacanian estate, who first presented in the term in 1966, and it was quickly put to use in film studies ("Suture"; Oudart, "Dossier Suture"). The theory begins with the supposition that there are gaps in a narrative that must be filled by the viewer in order to stabilize the sense of the narrative. The process of establishing sense does not occur by hailing the audience, but through the structural necessity of an audience 'suturing' the symbolic gaps inadequately bridged by signifiers that stand in for the absent subject. As defined by Jacques-Alain Miller: "Suture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse" (93). A further elaboration of the concept: moments of suture are "quilting points" [point de capiton] that knits together signifier and signified ("by which the signifier stops the otherwise indefinite sliding of signification"), whose relation is arbitrary and prone to slippage - a basic Saussurean point (Lacan, "Subversion of the Subject," 681). The effect of a quilting point is meaning. Like many Lacanian terms, he gives an everyday name to a topological concept: quilting point is taken from upholstery, as in attachment of deep buttons on a Chesterfield sofa (in fact, Bruce Fink translates point de capiton as "button tie" in "Subversion" on page 681). A popular example for demonstrating suture/quilting points is the analysis of Spielberg's Jaws, in which analysts show that a monster is never just a monster, but also that any single reading of the monster in insufficient (rumors have it that Fidel Castro interpreted the film to be about Cuba-as-Amity fighting bloodthirsty American imperialism) (Jameson, Signatures of the Visible, 316-17n12). Instead, the variety of possible readings of Jaws, in their multiplicity, "suggests that the vocation of the symbol - the killer shark - lies less in a single message or meaning than its capacity to absorb and organize all these quite distinct anxieties together" (35). This follows from the basic psychoanalytic assumption that audiences must find quilting points in every film to establish the relevance that makes viewing enjoyable. The consequence of Jameson's argument is that films need not be ideologically manipulate because audiences always ideologically bridge the gap between narrative and social relevance (39). Interestingly, rhetoric really never took it up suture/quilting points outside of a few articles (with a Comm & Mass Media Complete search, 4 hits: 2 cinema, 1 triple C on "Media-Suturing Working Class Subjectivities," and a 2002 RSQ

article by Greg Dickinson on Starbucks).

Affect theory can be taken as a direct response to Althusserian interpellation. In his landmark piece on affect, Deleuze scholar Brian Massumi promises that, "affect holds a key to rethinking postmodern power after ideology" (*Parables*, 42). But even before that, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari declared that "there is no ideology and never has been" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 4). This was the jumping off point for Lawrence Grossberg in his 1992 book *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, in which he suggests as alternative to the Birmingham School's Althusserian theory of social formations with the much-more Deleuzian "affective alliance," which bears strong resemblance to what we now call 'assemblage theory' (80; 397). Grossberg's notion of affect was a particularly well-timed intervention. As audience became popular in star/celebrity studies in the late 1980's and early 1990's, the prevailing textual method was a semiotic analysis of the shared meaning invested in an American icon. One example is Jackie Stacey's *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (1994) in which she examines how women transformed themselves by imitating the hair, fashion, and style of their preferred stars. Grossberg's shift to affect cut the cord from resemblance and meaning, enabling the construction of "mattering maps" that looked beyond the identification of "ideological or psychoanalytic interpellations" to "different sites of investment" (84). The point was to demote meaning and return ambivalence, such as explaining how pleasure can be disempowering or why a politically radical guitarist's audience might be mostly Reagan voters (85; 169).

## Part II. Banal Rhetoric

Affective attempts to declare an end to ideology has not been lost on rhetorical theorists. Christian Lundberg folds affect back into the Lacanian paradigm through the category of enjoyment ("Passion of the Christ"). Others have followed suit (Jenkins, "Another Punctum;" Biesecker, "Whither Ideology?").

In a recent interview published in the media studies journal *Fibreculture*, theorist Alexander Galloway offers a contrasting image of affect, noting that:

Affect is a curious topic, partly because the critical commentary seems to contradict itself. On the one hand, Fredric Jameson chronicled what he called the 'waning of affect' under postmodernity (Jameson, 1991: 10–11). For him deep psychological structures have given way to more surface phenomena like irony and cynicism. Yet at the same time affect seems to be on the rise today. Deleuze and Guattari famously charted the liberation of affect. Social media proliferate with people's feelings and desires. Books and conferences are devoted to the subject. So who is right? Can both of these claims be true? Is affect on the wane, or is it on the rise?

Upon further examination the apparent contradiction dissolves. When Jameson says affect he really means emotion or feeling. He means the purely sincere affect of the romantic, Enlightenment ego. When Deleuzians say affect they mean affect proper, that is, affect as the postmodern replacement for modern sentiment. Modern subjects have sentiments, while postmodern subjects have affects. Thus Jameson's 'waning of...' and the Deleuzian 'turn to...' are precisely the same historical phenomenon. Modern sentiment succeeded too well, you might say – so much so that, even after disappearing, it has re-emerged everywhere, only now in simulated form (17).

Galloway's comments are part of a dialogue with fellow interviewee Patricia Clough about how affect has been rendered calculable through the measurement of digital bodies as/of data (15). My interest is how this turn to the 'shallowness' of affect illuminates the role of cybernetic governance, and what such a situation demands of us as rhetorical theorists.

I am interested in how banal rhetoric combines waning sentimentality but increased circulation. Boring documents are fairly emotionless but dripping with affect. This is because even as power incites, induces, and seduces, it need not be exciting. The distinction between excitement and power is further supported by the Deleuzian theorization of the difference between affect and emotion (Massumi, *Parables*, 26-28; 35-37; 61-65). To confuse emotion with power would be to forget about all of the mundane exercises of force, such as the tedium of bureaucracy, the dullness of logistics, the dreariness of cube culture, the monotony of workflow, or the drudgery of daily work at a terminal. Yet those modifiers – drudgery, monotony, dreariness, dullness, and tedium – do not represent a zero degree of intensity. These are the affects of the overwhelmed. Like 'less lethal' police technology, which increases its effectiveness by causing pain more efficiently, neoliberal control meticulously pushes bodies to the limit of their capacities (Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*). In their banality, the resulting affects are not drained of power but charged with it through liberal microphysics.

My larger point is greater than a critique of the psychoanalytic equivocation of affect and excitement. My purpose is to theorize the importance of affect for that rhetoric which remains indifferent to its audience. Naming an example of this rhetoric, famed Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini talked about the "language of infrastructures" not meant for specific individuals (Pasolini, Heretical Empiricism, 63; Lazzarato, Signs and Machines, 61). Note that the language of infrastructures is not the rhetoric of government paperwork, as bureaucracy hails its own audience through fill-in-the-blank boxes and mandatory signatures. Instead, there is banal rhetoric that lacks of an audience, for there are languages not meant for any subject whatever – "stock listings, currencies, corporate accounting, national budgets, computer languages, mathematics, scientific functions, [and] equations" that exist independently of our subjective experience of them (Lazzarato, Signs, 80). Consider an example given by Pasolini:

The productivity of investments in the highway plan thus depends on the coordination in a programming of the infrastructures of transportation that tends to resolve disequilibriums, eliminate obstructions, reduce the waste of competition among the different means of transportation, and in a word, give life to an integrated system on a national scale (14).

Remarkably, this speech was not an address to technicians but a televised groundbreaking of the Autostrada meant for the Italian public. It might be tempting to say that Moro is formally addressing 'The People of Italy.' Yet if we were to follow Michael McGee "in search of 'The People" of Moro's address, we would find none ("In Search"). Moro provides no representations of human subjects, only "disequilibriums," "obstructions," and "waste." And while similar to McGee's analysis, whereby "the people" become political subjects through a "collectivization process" (243), Moro does speak of collectives, yet he is not talking about a collection of individuals but the metal and concrete that make up the Autostrada's roads.

Moro could easily be criticized for his rationalization of language, which is the anti-bureaucratic objection posed by Pasolini, the Frankfurt School, and Weber before them. But such criticisms of instrumentalization are only romantic laments against postmodernism promoting the return to the sentimentality.

For me, I would rather account for Moro's speech as a form of *non-constitutive rhetoric* in which he employs a rhetoric that produces subjectivity through an affective solicitation that does not constitute a people (Holland, "Revisited, Part Two"). My claim is that the type of subjectivity that Moro's rhetoric produces is what Deleuze and Guattari call "machinic enslavement" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 456) For them, there are two intersecting forms of subjectivity: social subjection and machinic enslavement (456-457). Subjection is when we act as the users of a machine, whereas enslavement is when we are the cogs in it (Lazzarato, "The Machine"). Subjection "operates at the molar level of the individual (its social dimension, the roles, functions, representations and affections)," while enslavement "operates at the molecular ...[or pre-individual or infrasocial] level (affects, sensations, desires, those relationships not yet individuated or assigned to a subject)" ("The Machine"). To make things concrete, Deleuze and Guattari use sociologist Lewis Mumford's example of the "megamachine" made by the Egyptians to build the pyramids, which they say has been resurrected through "cybernetic and informational machines" to reconstruct a generalized regime of enslavement whose principal framework was first the business or factory but is now the whole biopolitical infrastructure of our urban, informatized, networked, digitized existence (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 456-459).

A more contemporary example of the banal rhetoric soliciting machinic enslavement comes from the trading room. Consider the semiotics of finance – financial signs refer to objects, and the resulting sign flows circulate the world in real-time as human subjectivity establish functional links to set share prices or sell off stocks (Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*, 96). The trader's screen creates their subjectivity by speaking to them through diagrams, curves, and data that makes flows of information "visible, comparable, and manipulable," but only in their limited affective capacity to "suggest, enable, solicit, instigate, encourage, and prevent certain actions, thoughts, affects" (97). So even if the intersecting curves of a worldwide computer network communicates to a trader, there is no singular voice of authority to hail them as a subject; rather, there are a multiplicity of signs with affects "installed 'before' the circumscription of identities, and manifested by transferences unlocatable with regard to their origin as well as their destination" (Guattari, "Ritornellos," 158; translation modified). Therefore, although we can say that the trader operates in the limited capacity as the user of a software system, their social subjection is overshadowed by the "mathematical systems, data banks, interconnected computer networks, telephone networks" that solicit the trader's subjectivity as a cog in the machine (99).

To summarize: contemporary power tends to produce subjectivity through affect more than authority (we could say this is an evolutionary step for the power that Foucault said 'produces more than it represses'). Affects are crucial to the resulting machinic enslavement, which is the effect of the 'languages of infrastructures' central to a cybernetic capitalism that increasingly treats its subjects as mere cogs in the machine.

## III. Consequences

Perhaps we are already past interpellation in critical rhetoric, which is to say: scholars have stopped looking for optimism in constitutive rhetoric that hails "the people," invokes an identity, or provides a symbolic program of action (McGee, "The People"; Charland, "Peuple Québécois"; Delgado, "Chicano Movement"). Affect theory now has us connecting the everyday activities of people producing value without being pinned to fixed identities, or bounded sites of action (Chaput, "Rhetorical Circulation"). My concern is that we need to maintain a deep ambivalence about the potential of affects. In one of the most memorable passages of Anti-Oedipus, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the political question cannot be 'how do we free up desire?' – or in our case: incite more positive affects – because in our society, free people willingly give up their freedom (29). As such, scholars of rhetoric should select artifacts that demonstrate the microphysical complicity of affects in our subjugation, such as Sara Ahmed's study of compulsory happiness as a form of gender exploitation, but we should also find artifacts that demonstrate how affects are remobilized for our freedom, as in Ahmed's feminist killjoy, who spreads negative affects to break the unspoken agreement to offer only constructive, sex-positive solutions (Ahmed, Promise of Happiness).

Yet even Ahmed's is perhaps too focused on social subjection and its binary logic of consent/refusal. Rhetorical scholars following in her footsteps would likely search out distinct counter-publics or out-law discourses (Warner, *Publics and Counter-Publics*; Sloop and Ono, "Out-Law Discourse"). Both fail to engage 'the languages of infrastructures,' which speaks in terms of

"samples, data, markets, or 'banks'" that circulate at levels "much more and much less than the person, the individual, and intersubjectivity" (Deleuze, "Postscript," 180; Lazzarato, Signs and Machines, 30). The response requires a thoroughly materialist analysis whereby the social subject is no long the default center of political action. Late in his life, Deleuze denounced the younger generations "strange craving to 'be motivated'" as part of a new system of domination ("Postscript," 181). His proposed solution was to escape to vacuoles of non-communication in order to engage in piracy or introduce viruses ("Control and Becoming," 175; "Postscript," 180). Perhaps this is only true for me because of my revolutionary communist convictions, but I firmly believe in the future of critical rhetorical scholarship on subjectivity, both new and old, that combines direct action and obfuscation to meet at the intersection of logistics and exodus.

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